

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9651

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AMCONSUL KARACHI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: PPP REORGANIZATION

BEGIN SUMMARY: PUNJAB GOVERNOR KHAR TOLD NEWSMEN LATE LAST WEEK THAT PROVINCIAL LABOR MINISTER MIAN MOHAMMAD AFZAL WATTOO WAS APPOINTED PRESIDENT OF PUNJAB PPP AT HIGH LEVEL PARTY MEETING WHICH MET UNDER PRESIDENT BHUTTO IN KARACHI JULY 11. THREE DAYS LATER KHAR ANNOUNCED APPOINTMENT OF SHER MOHAMMAD BHATTI, PRESIDENT OF LAHORE CITY PPP, AS PUNJAB GENERAL SECRETARY OF PARTY. APPOINTMENTS ARE OF INTEREST AS EVIDENCE OF DIRECTION PARTY REORGANIZATION MAY GO. BHATTI IS CAPABLE OLD-TIME POLITICO BUT WATTOO HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF CORRUPTION AND IS COMPLIANT YES-MAN TYPE. END SUMMARY.

1. PUNJAB GOVERNOR KHAR RETURNED TO LAHORE JULY 12 FROM HIGH LEVEL PPP MEETING UNDER PRESIDENT BHUTTO IN KARACHI PREVIOUS DAY. KHAR TOLD WAITING PRESS THAT BHUTTO HAD APPOINTED MIAN MOHAMMAD AFZAL WATTOO, PUNJAB'S MINISTER OF LABOR, AS PRESIDENT OF PUNJAB PPP, OFFICE FORMERLY HELD BY CENTRAL HEALTH MINISTER SHEIKH RASHID.

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2. THREE DAYS LATE, ON JULY 15, GOVERNOR INFORMED PRESS

THAT LAHORE CITY PPP PRESIDENT SHER MOHAMMAD BHATTI HAD BEEN APPOINTED GENERAL SECRETARY OF PUNJAB PPP.

3. WATTOO APPOINTMENT HAS RAISED MANY EYEBROWS HERE. IT WAS EXPECTED THAT HE, AS ONLY MEMBER OF PUNJAB CABINET WHO DOES NOT HOLD SEAT IN EITHER PROVINCIAL OR NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES, WOULD BE GIVEN SOME SORT OF ALTERNATE RESPONSIBILITIES BUT FEW IN LAHORE EXPECTED HIM TO END UP WITH SHEIKH RASHID'S OLD JOB. WATTOO HAS BEEN SUBJECT OF NEWS REPORTS AND PRIVATE GOSSIP SINCE MID-JUNE WHEN SIX PPP MPAS FROM BAHAWALPUR DIVISION, INCLUDING TWO FROM WATTOO'S HOME DISTRICT OF BAHAWALNAGAR, LEVELED SERIOUS CHARGES OF CORRUPTION AND NEPTISM AGAINST LABOR MINISTER. WATTOO DENIED CHARGES OF COURSE AND SHORTLY THEREAFTER AN OFFICIAL PPP HANDOUT QUOTED FOUR OFSMHESE MPAS AS CONTRADICTING THEIR PREVIOUS CHARGES. HOWEVER, ON JULY 2 THE REMAINING TWO MPAS MADE ADDITIONAL CHARGES AGAINST WATTOO OF HAVING ENGINEERED VIOLENT ATTACKS AGAINST THEM IN BAHAWALPUT. OPPOSITION PAPER JAMHOOR CLAIMED ON JULY 8 THAT 90 PUNJAB PPP MPAS CONDEMNED ATTACK ON THE ANTI-WATTOO MPAS AND CALLED ON GOVERNOR TO INVESTIGATE CASE. ONLY JULY 9 MIAN KHURSHID ANWAR, LEADER OF CML PARLIAMENTARY GROUP IN PUNJAB ASSEMBLY, RAISED ON FLOOR OF HOUSE ALLEGATIONS THAT WATTOO HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN SHADY DEAL RE IMPORT OF NEW BUSES FOR PROVINCIAL TRANSPORT FLEET. WATTOO AGAIN ISSUED STRONG DENIAL. ON SAME DAY, IN SARGHODA DISTRICT PPP CONVENTION PRESIDED OVER BY SHEIKH RASHID, THE TWO ANTI-WATTOO MPAS AGAIN RAISED QUESTION OF LABOR MINISTER'S CORRUPTION.

4. DESPITE ALL THIS SMOKE, CRITICISM OF WATTOO'S APPOINTMENT AS PROVINCIAL PPP PRESIDENT HAS BEEN MINIMAL. WATTOO IS LAWYER IN MID-40'S WHO JOINED PPP AFTER IT WAS FOUNDED AND BECAME VERY ENERGETIC PARTY WORKER WHO WAS NEVERTHELESS DEFEATED IN DECEMBER 1970 ELECTIONS. DESPITE THIS UNEVEN HISTORY, HE HAS APPARENTLY TURNED IN A REASONABLY EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE FIRST AS LABOR ADVISOR, THEN AS LABOR MINISTER, IN PUNJAB CABINET. OUR CONTACTS GIVE HIM SUBSTANTIAL CREDIT FOR KEEPING PUNJAB LABOR SCENE RELATIVELY QUIET DURING THE TROUBLED MONTHS OF 1972.

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NEVERTHELESS, HE IS GENERALLY DESCRIBED TO US AS BEING A GOOD YES-MAN WHO IS COMPLETELY SUBSERVIENT TO KHAR AND BHUTTO.

5. BHATTI, WHO HAS BEEN HOLDING THE OFFICE FORMERLY OCCUPIED BY CENTRAL FINANCE MINISTER MUBASHIR HASSAN, IS AN OLD POLITICO WITH LONG EXPERIENCE IN THE MUSLIM LEAUE AND NAP BEFORE BECOMING A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE

PPP. HE IS WELL THOUGHT OF BY PARTY WORKERS GENERALLY AND BY THE PARTY HIGH COMMAND FOR HIS HARD WORK AND IS GENERALLY EXPECTED TO DO A COMPETENT JOB AS PROVINCIAL GENERAL SECRETARY.

6. COMMENT: IT IS REFRESHING, AFTER HEARING REORGANIZATION TALK FOR THE PAST YEAR, TO SEE ANY SORT OF ACTUAL MOVEMENT. WE JUDGE, HOWEVER, THAT THESE TWO KEY PUNJAB PPP APPOINTMENTS DEMONSTRATE HOW PARTY APPARATUS WILL BE VERY CAREFULLY KEPT UNDER THE THUMB OF THE TOP PPP HIERARCHY. THE ALLEGATIONS OF WATTOO'S INVOLVEMENT IN CASES OF CORRUPTION HAVE CREATED LITTLE STIR LOCALLY WHERE CORRUPTION ALL TO OFTEN IS A WAY OF LIFE AT ALL LEVELS OF AUTHORITY. OUR PPP SOURCES TELL US THAT WATTOO MAY IN ANY CASE BE FORCED TO STEP ASIDE AT THE TIME OF THE BIG RESHUFFLE OF CABINET AND PARTY POSITIONS IN MID-AUGUST. ONE SOURCE CLAIMS THAT THE PARTY HIGH COMMAND HAS CLEVERLY PAID ITS DEBTS TO WATTOO BY THIS TEMPORARY ASSIGNMENT. MOST CONTACTS, HOWEVER, BELIEVE THAT HIS ABILITY TO FOLLOW ORDERS ENSURES HIM A FUTURE IN THE PARTY.
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